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## Authenticating belief and identity: the visitor and Celtic Christianity in Cornwall

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**Abstract:** For many visitors, the south western peninsula of mainland Britain is 'different'. Diverse sources of evidence suggest that the Duchy of Cornwall continues to possess traits from a Celtic legacy. This paper outlines perceptions of 'otherness' which are synonymous with 'Cornishness', thus fitting into the newly developing framework concerned with the authenticity of belief systems and symbolism in the realm of heritage tourism. Hence we review the nexus of relationships between religion and the past regarding the evidence for a Celtic Christian identity over time. To this effect we consider historical sources, such as guidebooks and postcards, before turning to contemporary research, drawing on visitors' book comments and the findings from a substantial on-site survey. Moreover, this study fits into wider sociological and ethnographic settings concerned with various issues surrounding Cornish identity.

**Keywords:** identity; Celtic Christianity; intangible cultural heritage.

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## 1 Introduction

“It is not wise to inquire into the cause of this supposition, that “the former days were better than these,” because, common as it is, it was never yet proved, nor indeed ever can be.” John Wesley (Of former times, 1787)

The preacher and co-founder of Methodism, John Wesley, was correct to question if one could assess with any degree of satisfaction whether things were better in the past. Yet as Lowenthal (1985) so eloquently evoked nearly 200 years later, we can at least claim its difference – the otherness of former times. Anecdotal as well as published evidence suggests that, for many people (indigenous and visitors alike), Cornwall continues to possess traits from a Celtic legacy. Resonating with Lowenthal’s (1996) work on the fabrication of heritage, Selwyn’s (1996) on tourism myths and Wang’s (2000) on authenticity, we argue that this evidence may be tangible or intangible. Genuine, tangible, examples include such archaeological features as Castle-an-Dinas, an Iron Age hill-fort in west Cornwall (Peters, 2005). Whereas a famous example of cultural invention exists with the inauguration of the Cornish Gorsedd (annual meeting of bards) in September 1928 (Jenner, 2004).

It was early researchers’ interest in the megalithic monuments and the Cornish language<sup>1</sup> which contributed to the Duchy’s emergent ‘Celticity’. Folklorist Robert Hunt asserted unequivocally that the Cornish were living Celts. His research held almost “religious status for those involved in the Celtic-Cornish Revival” [Hale, (1997), p.90]. With this, Cornwall’s offspring of the Celtic tiger was out of the cage. Critically, the concept of the Celtic was not applied to the peninsula before the early 18th century (Peters, 2005). It is therefore a post-Enlightenment construct – a creature born out of the onset of modernity.

Conversely, ‘the Celticity of the Cornish’ was one of the justifications for the (re)creation of a Cornish diocese in 1877 [Beckett and Windsor, (2003), p.221]. By 1933, the chief Cornish saints were incorporated in the Diocese of Truro’s liturgical observances, emphasising distinctiveness from the rest of England (Bradley, 1999). Festive rituals and other pseudo-spiritual events are pertinent to this type of discussion. The pagan fertility festival of Beltaine is still commemorated annually on 1st May, in the form of the Padstowian ‘Obby Oss’ (Laviolette, 2003). Another yearly spring celebration is held at Helston, a week later on May 8th, when the Hal-an-Tow and Furry Dance continue a centuries-old tradition. Such gatherings are as relevant to the people of Cornwall today as they are to the visitor, if not more so. They are certainly not examples of staged authenticity (Chhabra et al., 2003). Consequently, examined through Wang’s (2000) analytical framework, such events have *constructive authenticity* for locals and *existential authenticity* for visitors. And despite the huge differences in their demeanour or meaning, several symbolic associations with the Celtic nevertheless persist in both.

Furthermore, megalithic monuments have come to symbolise the Celtic/early Cornish culture: quoits, stone circles, menhirs, and ancient round houses, together with examples of gold torcs, lunulae and brooches. Such terms as menhir and cromlech illustrate

archaeology's adoption of Celtic words (Robb, 2002; Tilley et al., 2000). Indeed, the highest concentration of such sites in Britain occurs in Cornwall (Hale, 2002). In 1998, there were 1,267 scheduled monuments west of the Tamar and English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme is likely to increase this to 3,000 (Cornwall County Council, 2000).

Drawing on Jenkin (1945), Vernon (1998) refers to the suggestion that whilst material poverty might have been a real experience for local inhabitants, it concomitantly, created spiritual wealth. The reification of Old Cornwall as a spiritual resource strongly influenced individuals such as Morton Nance, Henry Jenner and Hamilton-Jenkin, resulting in the establishment of the Celtic-Cornish Society (1901), the Old Cornwall Society (1920) and the Cornish Gorseth (1928). Ironically, it is the very Celtic Christianity, which Bradley (1993, p.9) refers to as being "unique in its spirituality" and which had "assimilated many Pagan beliefs and practices", that is today sought after.

In outlining such perceptions of 'otherness' which are synonymous with 'Cornishness', this paper fits into a newly developing framework concerned with the authenticity of belief systems and symbolism within heritage tourism. We begin with a brief review of the concept of Celticity in the Cornish context. This leads to a discussion about the *The Age of the Saints* era since some visitors appear to have this in mind when visiting. Historical data sources, such as guidebooks, postcards and visitor book comments, are then used to enhance the findings of an on-site survey conducted over forty-eight days between March and October 2002, with 725 respondents, at three distinct churches – Gunwalloe, St Just in Roseland, and Lanteglos by Fowey. We thus review the nexus of relationships between religion and the past regarding the evidence for a Celtic Christian identity over time. An analytical section on heritage worship follows which addresses the scale and scope of the religious backgrounds that visitors encounter. Indeed, despite a focus on small parish churches, much of the heritage discussed in this text deals with the notion of intangible cultural heritage which embraces religion and religious practices as a valuable yet amorphous resource for both the tourism and cultural production industries (Smith, 2006).

## 2 'Cornishness and otherness'

Largely ethnographic in its origin, the concept of the 'other' (othering) is salient here since the Duchy has often been portrayed as distinct – inferior and subordinate – to the rest of England. Celtic 'Otherness' (Lowerson, 1994) has been a lure for visitors, many in search of a spiritual and romantic 'otherworld'. Some visitors' book comments intimate this, as we will see. Kneafsey (2002) has observed that, historically, 'geographical westerliness' has long been linked with Celticity and otherness. Hale (2002) and Weight (2002) nonetheless note that Cornish 'difference' has only been attributed to Celticity since the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly, Cornwall was presented "as some form of distant, yet still accessible, Arcadia" in the tourism promotion literature of the early twentieth century [Williams, (1998), p.175]. Whilst the accuracy of such statements is questionable, heritage – in tangible and intangible form – is omnipresent indicating continuity with a specific cultural landscape as well as the social construction of the past and the future (Busby et al., 2009; Harvey, 2001). The Cornish poet Charles Causley is credited with the comment that "Nobody but a plastic rhinoceros could fail to be conscious of the past in Cornwall" [Hurst, (1993), p.296]. It is not only the ancient past

that is dominant, the nineteenth century mining activity is much in evidence; its decline led to migration and diaspora. Overseas, the phenomenon of Cornishness is strongly exhibited in the USA and Australia, to a lesser extent in Canada, New Zealand and South Africa 'as well as in more unlikely places such as Cuba' [Payton, (1999), p.392].

Furthermore, the influence of artists, over the last 200 years, on perceptions of Cornwall also needs consideration. They have been influenced by the landscape and vice versa, hence, "it is the creation of works of art that themselves encompass a particular sense of Cornishness which vicariously immortalises many Cornish communities" [Laviolette, (2011), p.47]. Whilst the Newlyn and St Ives 'schools' influenced late Victorian and Edwardian tastes in the rest of the country, Cornwall's mysterious aura was brilliantly depicted by the skill of JWM Turner (1775–1851) who made two extensive stays in Cornwall between 1811 and 1813 (Cross, 1994).

Folklore compilations in the nineteenth century, such as *Popular Romances of the West of England: or Drolls, Traditions and Superstitions of Old Cornwall* (1865) and *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall* (1870–80), suggested Cornishness as a "dark and wild 'Celtic' culture' where the very ancient superstitions had survived the impact of Roman, Saxon, Danish and Norman invasion" [Vernon, (1998), p.157]. Not long after, in 1893, the Ethnographic Survey of the British Isles considered Cornish inhabitants and folklore at thirty-five locations, for they should provide a "remarkably uncorrupted race of 'primitive' people" [Vernon, (1998), p.159].

However defined, Cornishness permeates the landscape, highlighting the view that place is a socio-cultural construction rather than merely physical (Busby, 2002; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001, 2003) although "daily activities are affected by events elsewhere in the world" [Agarwal et al., (2000), p.247], not least the result of globalisation. Consider the view presented when travelling west on the arterial A30 trunk road on the western edge of Indian Queens. Here an historic panorama opens up, depicting an ancient church, industrial heritage and contemporary china clay extraction, yet with the golden arches of a drive-through fast food outlet in the foreground. Nonetheless, as Uzzell (1996) and Nuryanti (1996) point out, all destinations have some unique characteristics which, after all, create place identity.

Cornwall's contested features result from linguistic, economic, political and religious elements. Certainly, Andrew (1997), Harvey (2001, 2002) and the Cornwall County Council (2000) are far from the first to observe linguistic and cultural heritage characteristics distinct from the rest of Britain. Whilst the Cornish language presents an element of difference, many visitors frequently recognise the Cornu-English dialect. Kent (2005, p.27) refers to the dialect, itself, as being a cultural tourism activity, creating an 'exotic 'other''.

Before addressing the Cornish church heritage, it is worth remarking that visitor perception of churches west of the Tamar is likely to be coloured by the long-established representations of Cornwall overall, especially when compared with other English counties. Hence, the temporal dimension of visitor perception. Important distinctions between *a priori*, *in situ* and *a posteriori* visitor perception exist. Visitor perception *a priori* is the mental construction accumulated, incrementally, prior to the journey. Rojek's (1997) concept of representational files is salient here: "tourists have already visited the place before they physically visit it" [Espelt and Benito, (2005), p.778]. *In situ* perception is a critical moment in the holidaymaker's experience, for it can confirm (or otherwise) what was expected. Finally, the relevance of *a posteriori* perception is becoming apparent and this can occur in word-of-mouth testimony of the experience.

### 3 Cornish Celtic Christianity – *the age of the saints*

This section identifies certain features from previous centuries which are likely to appeal or influence visitors: some are tangible, such as *lans*, lych-gates, bench-ends and other aspects of woodwork, such as ceilings. Intangible features range from place-names derived from Celtic saints, through to historical, literary and artistic connections. Payton (2004, p.5) refers to the “iconic status (of the medieval Cornish church) as architectural expression of ‘Celtic Cornwall’”.

If the concept of Celticity still seems somewhat elusive, it is not without a number of critiques in the last two decades, let alone the last three centuries (Hale and Payton, 2000). For Chapman (1992), a key element in any definition is location “on the edge of a more dominant world” [Kneafsey, (2002), p.124]. For Ellis (1993) it is linguistic. For Bowman (1994), Celticity is a state of mind or what Hale (2002) terms elective affinity, synonymous with Wang’s (2000) existential authenticity. Whilst scholarly consensus concerning the concept does not exist (Payton, 1997; Busby, 2004), one can identify several phases of a Celtic discourse in Cornwall commencing in the 18th century, since it is argued that the saints did not articulate themselves as Celtic. Celticity is commodified in the Republic of Ireland for tourism promotion purposes (Kneafsey, 2002). To some extent, the same can be said for Cornwall although most associations with the Duchy are in the spiritual or alternative dimension because the romantic construction of the concept suggests a simple life close to nature (Bradley, 1999). Celtic Christianity, argues Kent (2002, p.212), is both “older and more ‘genuine’”. In any event, the concept of Celtic tourism and use of a Celtic theme in promotion is not new. Perry (1999, p.97) discusses the early pioneers: Silvanus Trevel, hotel developer, Thomas Hodgkin, banker, and the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould who, at the turn of the twentieth century, saw ‘potential in playing Cornwall’s trumpcard, its Celticity, to offset its neighbour’s (Devon’s) advantages in accessibility’.

Christianity in Cornwall dates from around 500 AD and is continuous thereafter (Jenkin, 1934; Halliday, 1959; Pearce, 1978; Thomas and Mattingly, 2000). Indeed, this record does not apply to any other English county for the impact of the Saxon conquest forced Romano-British fugitives into the south-west peninsula so that their religion “reached the already partially Christianised Celts of west Cornwall” [Halliday, (1959), p.78]. Most Cornish churches were founded in the period 500–800 AD (Jenkin, 1934); the principal early Christian settlements in the region “originated in the late 5th or 6th centuries as daughter houses of Welsh monastic communities” [Preston-Jones and Rose, (1986), p.155]. The early churches were constructed within enclosures which marked the consecrated area and were called *lans* (Orme 1991) or *lanns* (Preston-Jones and Rose, 1986). These vary in size from 0.2 to 2 acres and a number suggest a pre-Christian origin. Inevitably, the term has been incorporated into place-names such as Lanivet, Lanteglos and Lanreath, whilst gaps in the spatial distribution have possibly been filled by sites with *eglos* in the name, i.e., church, such as Egloshayle (‘church on the estuary’). The raised enclosure is a clear feature of many Cornish churches but may not be *seen* by most visitors. Nevertheless, it does stand as an indicator of Celticity for several church sites.

Orme (1991, 2000) suggests that although many of the saints came from South Wales, a number had Irish and Breton origins. Some may well have been indigenous Cornish (Orme, 2000). Whilst Saints Piran and Petroc, amongst others, are remembered through the establishment of churches dedicated to them, others are marked simply by place-names. A number of monastic productions of the lives of the saints were made, the

earliest being the Life of St Samson, dated to about 610 (Doble, 1970). The point is that, just as with the myths of Celtic identity (Kneafsey, 2002), these legends are based on genuine, existing landscapes that can be (and undoubtedly are) visited. Moffat (2001) has emphasised this in a two-part television programme. Table 1 illustrates the number of sites associated with Celtic saints in the peninsula.

**Table 1** Church and chapel sites of ‘Celtic’ saints in Cornwall

Total number of saints venerated at sites in Cornwall	140
Total number of such sites in Cornwall	185
Relationship of saints to sites:	
Saints with 1 site	112
Saints with 2 sites	18
Saints with 3 sites	3
Saints with 4 sites	3
Saints with 5 sites	1
Saints with 6 sites	1
Saints with 7 sites	1
Approximate number of saints:	
Unique to Cornwall	78
Same with 1 site in Cornwall	70
Venerated inside and outside Cornwall	62
Same with 1 site in Cornwall	41

*Source:* Adapted from Orme (2000).

The establishment of the Tamar as the border with Devon, by Athelstan, also puts Cornwall alongside the oldest geo-political entities in Western Europe. Not surprisingly, this led to the territory’s claims to distinct cultural identity (Payton, 1993). The Saxons referred to churches comprised of communal groups of clergy as *minsters* and, in Cornwall, by the eleventh century these were all “named after and dedicated to a unique male Celtic saint” [Orme, (1991), p.9]. The Celtic church’s strength, during this period, is evidenced by the large number of parishes named after a Cornish saint (Hooke, 1999). For the visitor, there are 185 church and chapel sites of Celtic saints (Orme, 2000). However, when the place-names associated with a Celtic saint where no religious building exists are added, the visitor may truly believe to be in *The Land of the Saints*. In his programme, Moffat (2001) also raises the phenomenon of numerous road signs indicating places named after Celtic saints. That is, the journeyings of individuals fifteen hundred years ago have left a highly distinctive mark. They can thus be read as unique cultural signifiers.

#### 4 The contemporary Cornish Celtic church visitor

Some scholars suggest that “there was no such thing as a Celtic Church and that the whole notion of Celtic Christianity is a myth” [Bradley, (1999), p.189]. Whilst this might be an accurate assessment, it does not stop visitors to Cornwall believing in such a

concept. For instance, Cunliffe (1997) refers to a New Celtomania in Europe, where visitors are more likely to be spirit Celts rather than blood Celts (Robb, 2002). In reviewing *The Outsider* by the Cornish resident Colin Wilson, Dossor (1990) argues that humans can only exist if they have a sense of values and, for many, the whole concept of Celtic Christianity imbues an alternative dimension (Bradley, 1999; Kneafsey, 2002). What cannot be doubted is that numerous road signs indicating places named after Celtic saints have some sort of influence upon the visitor. A few visitors do recognise the existence of a *lan*.

The visitors' books for three churches, Gunwalloe, St Just-in-Roseland, and Lanteglos-by-Fowey provide comments from both diasporic Cornish and those who feel an affinity with the various features associated with Celtic Christianity. Spirit Celts purloin myths and practices that suit in order to connect with the Other (Digance, 2003). Importantly, Celtic Otherness is an externally-generated phenomenon (Payton, 1997). Harvey (2002, p.239) argues that "it is a truism that society has always viewed itself in terms of the 'Other'" – so apposite for many representations of Cornwall. However, according to Schmitt (1998, p.376), the 'Other' is "necessarily fictitious in its discourse, no matter what the objective reality is".

**Table 2** Visitors Book comments

<i>Visitor book comments</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Text</i>
Gunwalloe		
VB1	22 April 2000	"We have ancestors buried here – a special moment"
Lanteglos by Fowey		
VB2	23 April 2000	"great-great-great grandson of Thomas Nunn Jewell and Elizabeth. Buried here 1882".
VB3	18 May 2000	"Decendant ( <i>sic</i> ) of HENRY BATE??? Buried in churchyard"
VB4	10 May 2000	"Grandparents' resting place – (Pearce's from Trevecca Farm)".
VB13	23 Sep 2000	"So beautifully Cornish"
St. Just in Roseland		
VB5	23 May 2000	"Here for generations my mother's father's family (Kendell) worshipped"
VB6	4 Oct 2000	"We finally found our roots, we're so proud to be Pascoe's"
VB7	22 Oct 2000	"Church of our ancestors"
VB8	26 Dec 2000	"Tracing our ancestor Eleanor Wolgrove"
VB9	15 Feb 2000	"Relative of John Luer 1542 (Vicar)"
VB10	9 May 2000	"This glorious Celtic church is beautiful"
VB11	10 July 2000	"Pre Augustine!"
VB12	23 Sep 2000	"very different"

The 'Cornish diaspora' (Rowse, 1969), of the nineteenth century, whereby many thousands emigrated overseas might account for a large proportion of visitors (Payton, 1999; Rowse, 1965). This is certainly an important tourist market. It is worth noting

Payton's reporting of Price's estimate: "in 1992 between 245,000 and 290,000 Australians were of significant Cornish descent, with perhaps as many as 850,000 with some Cornish connections in their family trees" [Payton, (1999), p.393]. Numerous entries in the Gunwalloe visitors' book allude to diasporic connections. For example, from a New Zealander: "We have ancestors buried here – a special moment" (VB1). From Lanteglos, examples from Australian and Canadian visitors are present: a visitor from Victoria, Australia states that he is the "great-great-great grandson of Thomas Nunn Jewell and Elizabeth. Buried here 1882" (VB2); a visitor from Sorrento, Australia queries "Decendant (*sic*) of HENRY BATE??? Buried in churchyard" (VB3); and two visitors from Toronto, Canada state "Grandparents' resting place – Pearce's from Trevecca Farm" (VB4).

Similar examples from St Just are illustrated: "Here for generations my mother's father's family (Kendell) worshipped", visitor from Alberta, Canada (VB5) and South Africans write "We finally found our roots, we're so proud to be Pascoe's" (VB6). In 1903, Johannesburg was "but a suburb of Cornwall" [Hind, (1907), p.352]. Visitors from California, state "Church of our ancestors" (VB7) and a New Zealand family writes "Tracing our ancestor Eleanor Wolgrove" (VB8): the time of year does not deter this visitor type.

A domestic tourist (Surrey), rather than one from the diaspora, notes at St Just that he is a "Relative of John Luer 1542, Vicar" (VB9). This is the only ecclesiastical connection stated in the visitors' books. Whether these visitors consider that they possess 'Celtic' or 'Cornish' Christian roots is intriguing. The answer may be subliminal. It is argued that they are in *existential mode* [Cohen, (1979), p.191], desiring 'to find one's spiritual roots'. This is echoed by McCain and Ray (2003, p.716) in their paper on legacy tourists, as they term them, whereby such visitors might garner a 'feeling of completeness'.

Then, there are those who may be seeking Celtic elective affinity or just simply cognisant of difference, as the following comments suggest. At St Just, a visitor from Gosport states "This glorious Celtic church is beautiful" (VB10). One, from Bristol, simply states "Pre Augustine!" (VB11) and a Canadian, "very different" (VB12).

However, at Lanteglos, very much a Celtic Christian site within its *lan*, and incorporating two Cornish nouns, there are no references to Celtic aspects. Indeed, there is little to indicate a perception of *Otherness* apart from "So beautifully Cornish" (VB13). Reflection on the comment from St Just (VB10), above, generates the question as to whether the visitor was viewing the church as Celtic or, because it is in Cornwall, the church as Cornish (Celtic), the county, as a totality, can be perceived as Celtic. Arguably, for visitors more readily-identifiable Celtic sites exist (example: Chysauster, promoted in English Heritage's promotional literature as Celtic and with reference to the Cornish language). As Deacon (2004, p.18) observes: "within the 'tourist' discourse of Cornwall, the sign 'Celtic' becomes a moment attached to 'romance', 'tradition', 'King Arthur', 'standing stones', 'jewellery' and so on". In the absence of much (or any) *interpretation*, the visitor is left to construe their own Cornish church *heritage*. Cultural construction thus influences many in their interpretation of the church.

This is, perhaps, manifest by some findings from an on-site survey of visitors to the same three churches, conducted between March and October 2002, resulting in a sample of 725. Twenty-four reasons were given in response to the 'open' question asking whether the church appears different from those in the rest of England. Nearly half of all respondents (46.6%) considered there was no difference although, for the others, the range of reasons given was diverse, with no single one standing out, as Table 3 illustrates.



**Table 3** Reason church appears different from those in rest of England

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>
Type of building materials	63	17
Smaller than usual	62	16
Architecture	52	14
Older than the norm	46	12
Remote locations	25	7
Vaulting/ceiling	17	4
Celtic	16	4
More character	15	4
Simpler	15	4
Part of landscape	14	4
Atmosphere	12	3
More welcoming	10	3
Their history	7	2
Unique	6	2
Left unlocked	4	1
Spacious	4	1
Pew ends	3	<1
Lans	2	<1
Similar to churches in Brittany	2	<1
'High' church	2	<1
Bigger than usual	2	<1
Named after Cornish saints	1	<1
Less Victorian influence	1	<1
No comment or not different	332	
Missing	12	
Total	725	

Notes: Gunwalloe visitor respondents:  $n = 286$ .

St Just-in-Roseland visitor respondents:  $n = 294$ .

Lanteglos-by-Fowey visitor respondents:  $n = 145$ .

If the stated reasons 'Celtic', 'architecture', 'lans', 'smaller than usual', 'named after Cornish saints' and 'similar to churches in Brittany' are conflated, then nearly one in five of all visitors perceive that difference relates to Otherness. When added to assertions that the church is 'part of the landscape', 'more character' and 'older than the norm', there is concurrence with Payton's notion of "romantic portrayal of 'Otherness' by outsiders" [Payton, (1996), p.47]. It is thus a fine point as to whether Otherness, axiomatically, equates to notions of Celticity.

Cornishness or Celticity are increasingly important given the lower per-unit costs of travel (Coles et al., 2005). With the numbers of Australians with Cornish connections, stated above, it is sobering to note that celebrities such as Clive James and John Baxter felt it necessary, because of 'stratospheric air fares', to spend 30 days on board ship to

reach Europe as recently as 1969: “the trip was nobody’s idea of fun” [Baxter, (2002), p.134]. From 30 days to less than 24 hours, at significantly lower cost, in real terms, can only stimulate identity-forming exercises: “diasporic travel and tourism shape an individual’s self-perception” [Coles et al., (2005), p.474].

This is evidenced by the visitor book findings presented above. The establishment of frequent flights between Australia and London also illustrates Urry’s (2000) uses of such concepts as scapes and flows, whereby tourism spaces have become “deeply structured by scapes – (including) flight routes” [Shaw and Williams, (2004), p.3] which, in this case, create another level of connectedness with diasporic communities. As McLean (2006, p.3) notes, research into the relationship between identity and heritage is at ‘a nascent stage’. Nevertheless, a growing literature argues that for many, affinity with Celtic nations is important in the formulation of their communal, genealogical and self-identity. This research thus builds on the church visitor typology proposed by Brice et al. (2003).

## **5 Heritage worship in Celtic Cornwall**

Regarding the number of Anglican establishments in Cornwall, Hamilton, Jenkin (1934) identifies 220 parish churches. For visitors, Cornish churches are exemplars of ‘serious heritage’ [Kennedy and Kingcome, (1998), p.57]. In terms of the proportion of Grade I and II\* properties to the total for the Duchy, the current estimate, based on the Truro Diocesan Directory (2001), suggests that there are 224 churches of which 130 are listed grade I and 66 are II\*, representing 58% and 29% of the total respectively.

The richness of the Cornish church heritage must be understood by considering its chronological development from earliest times. “There is no ideal spot on the temporal continuum that inherently deserves emphasis [...] In elevating or admiring one piece of the past we tend to ignore and devalue others” [Crew and Sims, (1991), p.160]. Canon Miles Brown (1973) has noted that visitors may be puzzled by the characteristics of Cornish churches and the names of the saints who often have parishes named after them. Such statements by a lady from London equally indicate why Cornish churches appear different to those of other counties: “this funny little group of buildings (church & belfry) is just across the cove” (see postcard comment (PC4) in Table 5).

A further point to make about the peninsula’s worship heritage concerns its place in the indigenous cultural legacy (Busby, 2003; Busby and Meethan, 2008). The church both symbolises Cornish culture, historically, and to some extent reproduces it. In contemporary tourism, the historically layered relations intersect with newer social ones such as the rapid expansion of Methodism in the 18th century. For instance, roughly 700 chapels survive in Cornwall today. Over 80% of these are Methodist in origin. Several date back to the 1700s but were re-built in the nineteenth century (Lake et al., 2001). Many forces were responsible for the convergences between Christianity and Celticity in the years following the Wesleyan introduction of Methodism to Cornwall. Like the other charismatic lay preachers of the time, Billy Bray of the Carnon Downs area, preached to the people in the dialect they spoke, giving a sense of social inclusion. His background as a miner also gave credibility to the notion that Methodism was a faith of and for the people – a more democratic form of worship.

Additionally, itinerants and women preachers, certainly among the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists before 1840, fashioned a sisterhood of reciprocity that took

place within the domestic sphere. They sought solace in the democratic message of the Methodist Gospel as the hub of labour shifted from the home to the public sphere of the mine. Early meetings took place in cottages, barns or outdoors. Hugely popular, this cottage religion where women were actively spreading the Methodist message at a grassroots level became embodied in the Cornish way of life before its appearance in other rural parts of England. This gave Methodism a popular accessibility ideally suited to the close-knit groups found in Cornish mining communities. Additionally, the geographic isolation of the rural parish church, exacerbated by pluralism and an absentee clergy, helped in the indigenisation of this developing Cornish Christianity (Schwartz, 1998).

Significantly, these familiar everyday dialectic, domestic and democratic settings allowed a synergy between Methodist spirituality and pre-existing Cornish-Celtic folk beliefs. Methodism translated such vernacular beliefs into a religious idiom – connecting old and new – binding the ancient ways with a developing industrial modernity (Luker, 1986). Cornish Methodism was thus increasingly divergent from the religious situation of the rest of England and significantly convergent with the other marginal regions with which it already shared a Celtic legacy – The Isle of Man, Wales, Scotland and Ulster.

Certain films, set in Cornwall, as well as the development of the World Wide Web have provided a contemporary influence (Busby and Klug, 2001; Busby and Laviolette, 2006). Some parishes have created web-sites of their own. St Just in Roseland, one of the top two visited churches in Cornwall, has an extensive range of views of the property (<http://stjust.roselandchurches.co.uk>) and the Diocesan website (<http://www.truro.anglican.org>) features a parish of the month link. Virtual tours of some of these properties are complemented by virtual visitors' books. Another form of website is provided by the Lynher Valley marketing consortium (<http://www.lynhervalley.co.uk>) whereby details of the twelve churches along the length of the river are provided. This website juxtaposes notions of diaspora with the Lynher Valley, providing a family history page. Of the seven messages viewable on 19 October 2011, one was from New Zealand, one Australia, two from USA, two from Canada and one from UK. As Cunningham (2010) has observed, the forms of media now available permit interaction with virtual heritage sites.

Turning to another form of visitor advice, guide-books have an influence on visitor numbers, what Horne (1984) calls devotional texts. In *Mythologies*, Barthes (1957) has famously analysed the role that world holiday guides play in France by examining Hachette's series of global 'blue guides' (*Guides Bleus*). He argued against the idea that these items were products destined to enhance one's appreciation of landscape. Nor, did they act as educational devices in the service of increasing one's cultural capital in terms of perception or geographical awareness. Instead, Barthes claimed that travel paraphernalia such as guides were blinding agents, directing the user's attention away from the everyday. They masked what was 'real' in the mundane history of human experience. By this profusion of sensationalism, such items advanced an ideology of individualism which considered the ethos of travel to be 'effort and solitude'. Through introducing the concept of sight-seeing, these resources have come to allow for the purchase of effort and it is in this indirect sense that they are able to serve the bourgeoisie. Hence, travel guides form part of a hegemonic ideological strategy of tourism leisure.

Thirty respondents in the face-to-face survey named specific guide-books. Such publications can indeed be considered as hegemonic image creators (Espelt and Benito 2005; Lew, 1991), reinforcing perceptions of Cornwall. Simmons (1952) and Vaughan (1974) comment that Murray's 1851 guide to Devon and Cornwall was the first of a series in the UK, revealing a growth in travel. Table 4 provides some examples of guides featuring the three survey site churches, in reverse chronological order of publication.

With mass tourism developing from the second half of the 19th century, a number of guides may have influenced the tourists' choice of attraction to visit – this is also when the first Celtic revival dates from (Westland, 1995). The guide descriptions were not minimal: Murray's 1879 handbook provided twenty lines of text for Gunwalloe and eleven for Lanteglos. The latter considered "worth a visit, is falling into ruin from neglect" [Anon, (1879), p.132] whilst Gunwalloe is "a lonely and picturesque 15th century structure" [Anon, (1879) p.97]. Interestingly, the entries in Kelly's Directory for 1926 are distinct from those for 1873; the 1926 edition details Gunwalloe "The church of St Winwalloe...one of the oldest churches in Cornwall" [Kelly, (1926), p.139], St Just requires 21 lines, and Lanteglos, 'an ancient building' [Kelly, (1926), p.188] 40.

Whilst Murray's guides were ground-breaking at the time, "clear, accurate, wide-ranging, constantly informative", as historian Jack Simmons (1952, p.99) observed, they were quickly followed by many different publishers' single volumes. It was only with the publication of the *Little Guides*, by Methuen, in 1900, that a new approach was made: each parish was detailed, in alphabetical order:

"Two-thirds of the new guides were devoted straight away to the churches, so that in parish after parish the reader gets the impression that nothing but the church is worth looking at: houses, farm-buildings, bridges, roads, let alone social customs and peculiarities – they are all subordinated to churches." [Simmons, (1952), p.102].

The first of the *Little Guides* published for the west-country was *Cornwall* in 1903. Completely revised, it appeared in 9th edition format in 1950. Given that copies are widespread still, it is of particular relevance to contemporary visitors. Significantly, the Hicks' edition of *The Little Guide to Cornwall* displayed "the usual romantic approach to the county" [Simmons, (1952), p.105]. However, it has been pointed out that actually the:

"outpouring of guide book literature on Cornwall did not in the main re-emphasise existing differences but created new differences and new myths often revolving around aspects of the landscape and a sense of 'mystery.'" [Deacon, (1993), p.206].

With late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century guidebooks, the question arises as to what the visitor thought of these churches. One source, for visitor opinion a century ago, is that of postcards. In Britain, picture postcards began to appear during the middle to late 1890s. Their popularity was at its highest just before the First World War. Post Office records reveal that the number of postcards sent in 1898 was 313 million and rose to 926 million by 1914 (Briggs, 1988). This rise inextricably connects with the so-called 'democratisation of travel' and the development of the modern tourist industry. People generally ascribe postcards to the realm of popular culture, belittling their significance as transient artefacts. More recently, however, their fleeting elements have crossed the threshold of credibility as signifiers of culture and have gained the attention of certain influential post-structural and post-modern theorists (Derrida, 1980; Edwards, 1996).

**Table 4** Churches detailed in general guide-books to the county of Cornwall

<i>Guidebook</i>	<i>Gunwalloe</i>	<i>St Just-in-Roseland</i>	<i>Lanteglos-by-Fowey</i>
Andrews (2001)		Yes	
Stanier (1987, 1993)	Yes	Yes	
Pope (1983, 1988)		Yes	
Davidson (1978)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kay-Robinson (1977)		Yes	
Hammond (1966)	Yes		
Berry (1963)	Yes		
Salmon (1903, 1950)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mee (1937, 1955)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cowles (1934)		Yes	
Kelly (1926)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Moncrieff (1907)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Black (c.1904)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Folliott-Stokes (no date, estimate late 19th century)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tregellas (1887)	Yes	Yes	
Craik (1884)	Yes		
Murray (1879)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kelly (1873)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Burritt (1865)			Yes

Fortunately, the Courtney Library of The Royal Institution of Cornwall commenced a detailed catalogue of postcards in 2004. Table 5 illustrates those cards pertinent to two of the survey churches, from their collection, none being available for Lanteglos. From the comments, it is apparent that Gunwalloe is perceived as distinctive. What is, additionally, useful appears on the photographic side of the two different 1904 cards, namely the aerials of Marconi's transatlantic transmitting station, very much a global-local icon. All eight cards show different views and some are in 'primitive' colour rather than monochrome.

In their study of twelve Welsh postcards, Pritchard and Morgan (2003, p.112) argue that this medium influences discourses of place, romanticising notions of the other and marking cultural difference 'between the colonial and the colonised, between 'us' and 'them''. Does the postcard PC4 hint at this? From Cornish 'periphery' to St John's Wood 'centre'. Furthermore, the card was mailed only 14 years after the Ethnographic Survey referred to above. With the comments "Do you like this view. Have you seen anything to equal it in Devon or (?). Church situated about 2 miles from Mullion village" the postcard PC3 suggests a certain sense of 'difference'. Whilst the more straightforward message "I am back at my favourite spot" in PC6 echoes a theme common to Cornwall – that of the repeat visitor. What the postcards convey is interplay between historic structures and landscape, emphasised by Aitchison et al. (2000), whereby one is not quite the same without the other. Such postcards are good examples of off-site 'markers' (MacCannell,

1976). They indicate the church as an attraction and, in some instances, the visitors' relationship to the sight/site: for one visitor, his or her favourite spot (PC6).

**Table 5** Postcards featuring Gunwalloe and St Just in Roseland Churches

<i>Postcard comment</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Addressee</i>	<i>Text on postcard</i>
Gunwalloe			
PC1	2 April 1904	Miss Symons, Ringwood	A happy Easter... (nothing pertinent to church)
PC2	5 April 1904	Mrs Woodhams, Ealing, London	This is the view from my window. The 10th green is beside the church yard. I am sending you some cream...
PC3	31 Dec 1904	Mrs Gooden, Plymouth	... Do you like this view. Have you seen anything to equal it in Devon or (?). Church situated about 2 miles from Mullion village.
PC4	26 Mar 1907	Miss Colenso, St John's Wood, London	This funny little group of buildings (church and belfry) is just across the cove.
PC5	9 Nov 1912	Mrs Buckland, Englefield Park, Nr. Reading	(Nothing pertinent to church)
PC6	25 Sept 1922	Mrs Barber, Penzance	I am back at my favourite spot.
PC7	14 Feb 1927	Miss Tarrant, Penryn	This is the little church in the cove... I often walk down to it by the road you see on the left.
PC8	4 Sept 1934	The Family Ferris, Wanstead, Essex	(Nothing pertinent to church)
St Just in Roseland			
PC9	? 1934	Mrs Marlin, Balham, London	... tin of cream same post (nothing pertinent to church)
PC10	21 April 1911	Miss May, Carn Brea	Do you recognize the view on other side?

*Source:* G. Busby, based on records in Courtney Library archive, Royal Institution of Cornwall, Truro.

## 6 Conclusions

Tangible and intangible features associated with notions of Cornish Celticity and Otherness form paradoxical religious belief systems. These cultural, historical and heritage features, visited by tourists, not only shape their own travelling identity but also their conception of Celticity and, accordingly, Celtic Christianity. Indeed, Celtic Saints 'sell'! The Porth y Waen Study Centre advertised a 'Celtic Saints in Cornwall Study Tour', from 20th to 25th May 2006, at £450 per person, in the Offa's Dyke Association Newsletter [ODA, (2006), p.25].

This reveals a discrepancy between common-sense belief and the visitation experience, a situation which contradicts prevailing social norms but which is reconciled via an idiomatic articulation of the Celtic. Based on an eclectic range of sources, we suggest that a belief in Celtic Cornwall is one manifestation of otherness. This discourse is appropriated by a significant number of visitors, *colouring* their travel experience. Interestingly, however, when it came to expressing their views on paper, most visitors were hard pressed to identify any unique characteristic of the Celtic in the Cornish churches they visited. The Celtic for holidaymakers thus seems to exist in the tourist imagination more than anywhere else, at least for those with only fleeting connections to their destination. It is likely that it is constructed in their *a priori* exposure to Cornwall rather than to their actual holiday experiences. The point is thus that otherness is not necessarily axiomatic, with any conceptualisation of Cornish Celticity. Features not (yet) associated with Celticity can, in and of themselves, create a certain sense of spatio-cultural otherness.

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## **Notes**

- 1 Lhuyd investigated Celtic linguistics as early as 1700.